WHAT IS CLAIMED IS:

1.   A set-top terminal for connecting a subscriber to a cable network, said terminal comprising:

a processor; and

a memory unit;

wherein, when a download of data or programming is offered to said set-top terminal over said cable network, said processor only accepts said download and records said download in said memory unit when one or more predetermined criteria are satisfied, said criteria tending to indicate that acceptance of said download will cause a minimum of interfere with said subscriber's use of said set-top terminal.

2.   The terminal of claim 1, wherein said one or more criteria are downloaded to said set-top terminal over said computer network.

3.   The terminal of claim 1, wherein said set-top terminal verifies that said data or programming offered as said download is not already resident in said memory.

4.   The terminal of claim 1, wherein said set-top terminal verifies that said data or programming offered as said download is specified as being intended for a class of terminals to which said set-top terminal belongs.

5.   The terminal of claim 1, wherein said one or more criteria include a time of day.

6. The terminal of claim 1, wherein said one or more criteria include whether said set-top terminal is turned off.

5   7. The terminal of claim 1, wherein said one or more criteria include a deadline by which acceptance of said download is required by an operator of said cable network.

10   8. The terminal of claim 7, wherein said set-top terminal defers said deadline if said set-top terminal is being used to provide a dedicated service including recording programming in conjunction with a VCR or providing pay-per-view programming.

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      9. The terminal of claim 1, wherein said set-top terminal signals said subscriber that said download is available and requests permission to accept said download, said one or more criteria including a
20   positive response by said subscriber to said request for permission to accept said download.

      10. The terminal of claim 1, wherein said set-top terminal tunes to a specified channel to receive said download if said one or more criteria are satisfied.

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      11. The terminal of claim 1, wherein if said one or more criteria are satisfied, said processor erases information in said memory unit and replaces said erased information with data or programming from said
30   download.

      12. The terminal of claim 1, wherein following said download of programming, said processor will only

execute newly-received programming from said download when one or more predetermined criteria are satisfied.

13. The terminal of claim 1, wherein, prior to accepting said download, said processor determines whether any programming is stored in said memory which is not being executed, but which is identified as being a later version than programming being executed by said processor at that time; if said processor locates any such later version of programming in memory, said processor will terminate execution of the programming being executed, erase said terminated programming from memory and reset so as to execute said later version of said programming.

14. The terminal of claim 1, wherein, when said one or more criteria for accepting said download have been satisfied, said processor will erase from said memory any older, non-executing version of said programming already resident in memory and replace said erased programming with new programming from said download.

15. The terminal of claim 1, wherein said memory unit is logically partitioned into two sections, a first section for containing programming being executed by said processor and a second section for receiving and storing programming from said download.

16. The terminal of claim 1, wherein each download of programming contains two versions of a programming object, a first programming object for storage in and execution from said first memory section and a second programming object for storage in and execution from

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said second memory section, wherein said processor downloads one of said two versions of programming in accordance with whether said first or second memory section is vacant.

17.   The terminal of claim 1, wherein said memory unit comprises two separate memory devices, a first memory device for containing programming being executed by said processor and a second memory device for receiving and storing programming from said download.

18.   A set-top terminal for connecting a subscriber to a cable network, said terminal comprising:
    a processor; and
    a memory unit;
    wherein, said set-top terminal occasionally receives a download over said cable network of new programming; and
    wherein following said download of programming, said processor will only execute said new programming from said download when one or more predetermined criteria are satisfied.

19.   The terminal of claim 18, wherein said one or more criteria include whether said set-top terminal is turned off.

20.   The terminal of claim 18, wherein said one or more criteria include detection of a commercial break in television programming being received by said set-top terminal.

21.   The terminal of claim 18, wherein said one or more criteria include a deadline by which

implementation of said new programming is required by an operator of said cable network.

22.   The terminal of claim 21, wherein said set-top terminal defers said deadline if said set-top terminal is being used to provide a dedicated service including recording programming in conjunction with a VCR or providing pay-per-view programming.

23.   The terminal of claim 18, wherein said set-top terminal signals said subscriber that new programming has been received and is ready for execution and requests permission to execute said new programming, said one or more criteria including a positive response by said subscriber to said request for permission to execute said new programming.

24.   A method for minimizing interruptions to use of a set-top terminal that connects a subscriber to a cable network where said interruptions result from downloading data or programming to said set-top terminal over said cable network, the method comprising accepting said download only when one or more predetermined criteria are satisfied, said criteria tending to indicate that acceptance of said download will not interfere with said subscriber's use of said set-top terminal.

25.   The method of claim 24, further comprising downloading said one or more criteria to said set-top terminal over said computer network.

26.   The method of claim 24, further comprising verifying that said data or programming offered as said

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download is not already resident in said set-top terminal.

27. The method of claim 24, wherein said method further comprising verifying whether said one or more predetermined criteria are satisfied.

28. The method of claim 27, wherein said verifying comprises comparing a time of day against a predetermined acceptable time of day for accepting a download.

29. The method of claim 27, wherein said verifying comprises determining whether said set-top terminal is turned off.

30. The method of claim 24, further comprising signaling said subscriber that said download is available and requesting permission to accept said download, wherein said one or more criteria include receiving a positive response by said subscriber to said request for permission to accept said download.

31. The method of claim 24, further comprising, subsequent to said download of programming, executing newly-received programming from said download only when one or more predetermined criteria are satisfied.

32. The method of claim 24, wherein, prior to accepting said download, said method comprises:
determining whether any programming is stored in said memory which is not being executed, but which is identified as being a later version than programming running on said set-top terminal at that time; and,

if any such later version of programming is located
in memory, terminating execution of the programming
being executed, erasing said terminated programming
from memory and resetting said set-top terminal so as

5   to execute said later version of said programming.

33.   The method of claim 24, wherein, when said one
or more criteria for accepting said download have been
satisfied, said method further comprises erasing from

10   said memory any older, non-executing version of said
programming already resident in memory and replace said
erased programming with new programming from said
download.

15   34.   The method of claim 24, further comprising
partitioning said memory unit into two sections, a
first section for containing programming being executed
by said processor and a second section for receiving
and storing programming from said download.

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35.   The method of claim 34, wherein each download
of programming contains two versions of a programming
object, a first programming object for storage in and
execution from said first memory section and a second

25   programming object for storage in and execution from
said second memory section, wherein said method further
comprises selectively downloading one of said two
versions of programming in accordance with whether said
first or second memory section is vacant.

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36.   A method for implementing upgraded programming
received in a set-top terminal for connecting a
subscriber to a cable network, said method comprising
terminating execution of existing programming and

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commencing execution of said upgraded programming only
when one or more predetermined criteria are satisfied.

37. The method of claim 36, wherein said one or
more criteria include whether said set-top terminal is
turned off.

38. The method of claim 36, wherein said one or
more criteria include detection of a commercial break
in television programming being received by said set-
top terminal.

39. The method of claim 36, wherein said one or
more criteria include a deadline by which
implementation of said new programming is required by
an operator of said cable network.

40. The method of claim 39, further comprising
deferring said deadline if said set-top terminal is
being used to provide a dedicated service including
recording programming in conjunction with a VCR or
providing pay-per-view programming.

41. A set-top terminal for connecting a subscriber
to a cable network, said terminal comprising:
a processor unit comprising a first processor and a
second processor; and
a memory unit;
wherein, said first processor is dedicated to
providing a user interface and said second processor is
dedicated to managing a download of data or programming
offered to said set-top terminal over said cable
network, such that said first processor can maintain

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said user interface including user services while said second processor manages a download.

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